

Women in double peril

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

Women face double peril. Inside barred doors it is humiliation, outside, there awaits public ire. Harassed and tortured women are going to court or police for protection. But even if appeals for protection are met, only scorn greets them when they return home.

THOUGH women have played a commendable role in societal and economic development, their status has hardly changed. A survey conducted by BBS and UNFPA showed that about 87% wives are subjected to torture by their husbands. The horror of domestic violence has always been with us, a persistent secret, silent, pernicious and, of course, brutal. But today it is spreading like an epidemic to more and more homes.

Not only in the cities and towns but also in the villages, terror has come stalking. And the weapon of fear is not only the gun but a can of kerosene and a match stick. Dowry deaths have become the most vicious of social crimes. Despite efforts by some activists and women's rights organisations to eliminate this vice, the number of victims has continued to rise.

It isn't surprising that a lot of women in abusive relationships tend to compromise. The tendency to go back or keep forgiving a violent man is also irrationally strong. "So what, let it be," is a common refrain that counselors who help abused women hear. The trouble is that when a relationship is on the verge of permanent rupture, the violence also escalates. At that point, the abused woman may seek help outside her home, but frequently the man will refuse any mediation, convinced that she, not he, is at fault. In many cases, the police turn a blind eye, saying that domestic violence is really a "private affair."

Marriage was once considered a sanctified bond, but dowry related deaths have shattered that bond of peaceful and happy rela-

tionship. Newspaper reports say that Afia Zaman and Joya Pal were burnt alive by their husbands and in-laws, and a young housewife was put in shackles and tortured brutally for dowry. The worst factor standing in the way to women's emancipation is early marriage, and the saddest part is that as many as 64% of the girls are forced into early marriage.

Criminologists and crime assessment wing of the government assert that crime rate among deviant young husbands has gone up by as much as 40%. The sudden affluence that has emerged, both in rural areas and in the cities, over the last one decade is considered as one of the primary factors. "The increase in violence is because the consciousness of the woman has changed," says a psychoanalyst. Women are better educated and don't take the "patibatra" concept at face value and stand up against ill-treatment.

As educated and even financially independent women begin to question male dominance, there is a sharp increase in atrocities against them, leading to more broken homes. In many cases career women complain of regular assault by their husbands. In such cases, the husbands cannot cope with the successful careers of their wives. The fact that more women are letting out that "secret" is encouraging since it needs tremendous courage. But there is uncertainty ahead. If the wife blows the whistle on an abusive husband, she risks losing her status, her standard of living and other privileges in the family. What's worse is that even after getting out of an abusive relationship, most women don't experience any relief. For many of them, it's almost like walking out of a support system.

All governments promised political and social equality for the sexes but, despite the societal improvements that have come about, incidences of sexual harassment and assault on women are still taking place. Economic compulsion, fear for their reputation, and social stigma force most women to remain

silence. According to Bangladesh Women Council, 338 women fell victim to torture in November 2013. Among them 55 were rape victims and 13 were killed after rape.

Every year scores of women are falling victims to acid violence. The perpetrators are often spurned suitors who feel that if they cannot have the woman they desire, they must mangle her so badly that she has no takers. "This is a new form of violence that is spreading fast," says a woman activist and a reputed lawyer handling cases of repression against women. Driven by vengeance and using this new weapon as a threat so that the victim's family dare not proceed with a court case, the perpetrators are now targeting the parents as well.

14 year-old Hena Akhtar, a rape victim in Shariatpur upazila, met a tragic death after being lashed in public on the edicts issued by some self-styled religious leaders in collusion with some local union parishad members in January 2011. Although a case was instituted on the orders of the High Court, most of the alleged accused have been absconding. They are now issuing threats to Hena's father to withdraw the case.

The fact is that social prejudice and double standards of the male dominated society stigmatise a woman, and she is more sinned against than she has sinned. Mental and physical abuse, humiliation, discrimination in pay and status, and barriers in taking loan and other facilities from either banks or other government agencies are still hurdles to be cleared by women.

Women face double peril. Inside barred doors it is humiliation, outside, there awaits public ire. Harassed and tortured women are going to court or police for protection. But even if appeals for protection are met, only scorn greets them when they return home.

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Bangladesh deserves its test status in cricket

FAKRUDDIN AHMED

FOR the record, I had opposed ICC's awarding Bangladesh test status in 2000 in these columns. I had agreed with coach Gordon Greenidge that Bangladesh was not test-worthy, and added that it would remain the doormat of test cricket for the next twenty years. I was partially right. I was also partially wrong.

The recent ominous cloud hanging over Bangladesh's future as a test playing nation has dissipated, and the nation's test status has been reaffirmed for now. This is a wise decision, and welcome news. The climb up the totem pole of test cricket requires time. It would have been unrealistic to expect Bangladesh to contend with Australia from day one. Fortunately, Bangladesh continues to improve, and a compelling case can now be made why Bangladesh should remain a test playing nation for the foreseeable future.

Historically, Bangladesh has been a football nation. Unlike India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, cricket was a minor sport in Bangladesh, playable for only a few months annually due to the rain-soaked grounds. Thanks to its test status, things are now changing. Cricket is fast becoming Bangladesh's major sport. I have travelled to remote villages and noticed that the kids are now playing cricket, not football. It will take a generation for the results of such dedication to manifest.

When Bangladesh started playing test cricket, it lost nearly all the matches (except to Zimbabwe). Thus far, it has won only one series at home (1-0 against Zimbabwe in 2005), and one against a depleted West Indies away (2-0, in 2009). But, these days Bangladesh draws more and more tests. That is improvement.

Bangladesh has had its chances against top teams. In the Fatullah test against Australia in 2006, Bangladesh scored 427 runs in the first innings -- 158 more than Australia's 269. Bangladesh collapsed to a paltry 148 in the second innings, setting Australia a target of 306. Australia barely won with only three wickets to spare. As Shane Warne alluded to later, Bangladesh

lost its nerve at the prospect of beating formidable Australia.

Confidence and improvement come from playing often, and against better opposition. ICC in its infinite wisdom has decreed that Bangladesh would play fewest tests every year, and against weaker opposition only. It is hard to fathom how that is a prescription for improvement.

The format of cricket Bangladesh plays most is the ODIs, where its record is not too shabby. Bangladesh has defeated every test nation in the ODIs. Bangladesh knocked out India, featuring Tendulkar in his prime, from the World Cup in the West Indies in 2007.

Bangladesh has beaten New Zealand in seven straight ODIs in Bangladesh -- 4-0 in 2010, and 3-0 in 2013. It also drew both the test matches against New Zealand in 2013, and beats West Indies regularly in ODIs. All this cannot be a fluke. Logic dictates that if Bangladesh plays more tests, its performance will approach that in the ODIs.

India is 22 times larger than Bangladesh, yet, after gaining test status in 1932, for the first 50 years India remained one of the weakest sides in test cricket, winning only 35 tests out of 196; a 17.85% winning clip. To this day, India has a losing record against Australia (24 wins, 38 losses), England (20 wins, 40 losses), Pakistan (9 wins, 12 losses), South Africa (7 wins, 12 losses) and the West Indies (16 wins, 32 losses). India has lost twice to Zimbabwe in 11 contests.

Indian batsmen were so shaky against fast bowling that its captain and opening batsman, Nari Contractor, was nearly killed when hit by a ball from speedster Charlie Griffith in the West Indies in 1962. Up until 1970, forty years into its test status, India, too, used to play mostly for draws. It was the arrival of superstar like batsmen Sunil Gavaskar, all rounder pace man Kapil Dev and a host of spinners in the 1970s that catapulted India into a major contender.

Bangladesh is following roughly the same trail. Previously ranked number one, Shakib Al Hasan is currently ranked the number two all rounder in the world. No batsman in the world is more promising than 22-year old Mominkul Haque, who has scored three centu-

ries in seven test matches, and patiently guided Bangladesh to a draw against Sri Lanka last week. Against New Zealand last year, Sohag Gazi became the only cricketer in the history of test cricket to score a century and take a hat-trick in the same match.

Along with Shakib, and India's Ashwin, Gazi became only the third player in ten years to score a century and take five wickets (he took six) in a test match. Against West Indies in 2012, Abul Hasan became the first number 10 batsman in the history of test cricket to score a hundred on his debut. Clearly, Bangladesh is bursting at the seams with budding superstars. It is up to ICC to nurture them.

Sure, Bangladesh needs to improve its cricket infrastructure. It has to generate a more competitive domestic league. Bangladeshi batsmen must learn to consolidate their advantage, and not to throw their wickets away after reaching a fifty, hundred or hundred and fifty; instead have the patience to score higher. Bangladesh also needs to develop fast bowlers. To those who snicker that Bengalis cannot bowl fast, let me mention India's new fast bowling sensation, Mohammed Shami. The last time I checked, he is a West Bengal!

Some top cricket nations find it beneath their dignity to play Bangladesh in test cricket. Although India insisted on playing against Bangladesh in its first test match in 2000, and subsequently its batsmen fattened their run aggregates, and its bowlers embellished their wicket tallies by playing Bangladesh, India remains the only nation not to host Bangladesh for a test match.

Bangladeshis are grateful to Sri Lanka, New Zealand, West Indies, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and South Africa for not treating it like a pariah, and for not harbouring qualms about playing it in test matches.

New prediction: If Bangladesh is allowed to play more than just a few test matches per year, there are plenty of reasons why in twenty years Bangladesh will be very competitive against the other three sub-continental teams -- India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

1 Skylit foyers

6 Half of a 1960s rock group

11 Bulls and Bears

12 Be real

13 Field covers

14 "Beau --"

15 Van Gogh subjects

17 Kickoff aid

18 Director's cry

19 Cardinal

22 Bond, for one

23 Immune system components

24 Dianne of "The Birdcage"

25 Vacuum tube

27 High deg

30 Painter's need

31 King, in France

32 Workout unit

33 Laundry problems

35 First letter

38 "Ghosts" playwright

39 Running mate of 2008

41 Plast pump

Cleaned, in a way

42 Unpleasant

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1 Top stories

2 Shred

3 Uncommon item

4 Little devils

5 Avowal

6 Cribbage need

7 Tin Man's prop

8 Flower part

9 Fall flowers

10 Mount

16 Breaks away

20 Cause for a court martial

21 Diner order

24 Finish first

25 It may be laid down

26 Wee wave

27 Uses a lever on

28 Truthful

29 Mickey's creator

30 Catches

34 "Waterloo" group

36 Roof part

37 Busy worker



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